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Teachers Attitudes toward Students Learning at Higher Levels: A Challenge to KERA?

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**Teachers' Attitudes Toward
Students Learning at High
Levels: A Challenge to KERA?**

by

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Abstract

"Teachers' Attitudes Toward Students Learning at High Levels: A Challenge to KERA?" discusses the underlying premise of the Kentucky Education Reform Act that states that all children can learn at high levels. Literature research was conducted from other states as well as from the state of Kentucky. The author distributed surveys in fourteen different schools in four different counties in the state of Kentucky. To clear up some confusion in the minds of educators as well as other citizens, the simple statement should be reworded to state that all children can learn at their highest possible level.

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Teachers' Attitudes Toward Students Learning at High Levels: A Challenge to KERA?

Introduction

The Kentucky Education Reform Act, passed in 1990, has become controversial in the state of Kentucky. Opponents of the reform act criticize several components, including the primary program, extended school services, and method of assessment. They also reject the belief that all children can learn at high levels, a major underlying premise of the reform. These opponents, coincidentally, include a cross-section of all Kentucky citizens: business professionals, factory workers, and even professional educators within the school systems.

Although the Kentucky Education Reform Act states that all children can learn at high levels, some teachers' disagreement can affect students' performance levels. In response to the author's question of how the Kentucky Education Reform Act defines learning at "high" levels, Kayanne Wilborn, who answers

telephone calls to the Kentucky Education Department information line, said that it basically means that all children, whether they are learning disabled or have ADHD (attention deficit hyperactivity disorder), can learn at a high level. She explained that research has shown that all children can learn. She also said that all children learning at high levels means that all children can learn any of the goals or academic expectations of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (Wilborn 1995).

Background

When the Kentucky Education Reform Act was passed, many Kentuckians wondered why the schools were undertaking such changes, some of which were even considered drastic. Robert F. Sexton, the executive director of the Prichard Committee for Academic Excellence, in a commentary entitled "Kentucky couldn't afford to wait for education reform," wrote that a smart acquaintance gave some useful advice as the reform act was beginning to be implemented. This colleague warned the Prichard Committee not to take it for granted that citizens understood the reasons Kentucky education needed to undergo such drastic changes (1993). People in general, and especially those who had no direct contact with education, did not know the situations which led to this decision.

Several factors, however, explained the necessity for changing Kentucky's schools. Charles Wolfe, a reporter for The News Enterprise, explained that some poor districts in Kentucky sued the state because of inequalities in state funding (6A). As a result of the suit, the Kentucky Supreme Court proclaimed that the education system of Kentucky was not making provisions for

every child, regardless of his/her county, to obtain a sufficient and equitable education. A court ruling in 1989 mandated that the General Assembly restructure schools and rewrite the laws dealing with education. Sexton further stated that the development of Kentucky's students must be the major concern for Kentuckians because the children are the future of the state. The reform developed from a concern for the quality of education and a belief that a state's low socioeconomic level related to education (Sexton 1993).

In "School Reform is not a Spectator Sport," Sexton reported that the law was created to change Kentucky's traditional views and practices and to move the state toward the twenty-first century. Other reasons for reform stemmed from basic statistics. For many years Kentucky has ranked last among the states in the number of high school and eighth grade graduates (1). In fact, Kentucky's work force was the least educated in the country by the early 1980's: a mere fifty-three percent of Kentuckians had high school diplomas. Only an estimated sixty-seven percent of the eighteen-year-olds became graduates. At a higher level, Kentucky was forty-ninth in adults holding college degrees and forty-sixth in college attendance. Maybe the most dismal statistic of all was that Kentucky was first in adult illiteracy (1993).

Another disheartening fact was that funding for schools was ranked from the forty-first to the forty-sixth, depending on the specific source. None of Kentucky's school districts was funded at the national average, which was around \$4,000 for each student. Another reason leading to the reform act was that low

achievement in education was related to many social wellness standards. Poverty was the way of life for about twenty percent of Kentucky's students, a statistic which meant the state was the seventh highest in poverty in the entire nation. Kentucky also ranked third in teen pregnancy and seventh in unemployment (1993). With all of these sad statistics, educational lawmakers had no other choice than to try to improve education in the state.

Various other sources also reported reasons reform was needed. The Partnership for Kentucky School Reform, in a pamphlet entitled "What is KERA?," explained that many of the jobs today's students will encounter have not even been created yet. Indeed, when these students get into the work force, they may be expected to receive new training seven times within their laboring years. In addition, international business makes it necessary for students to be competitive. Because technology and knowledge are expanding quickly, students must learn how to raise questions and find the answers. They also have to learn how to become effective problem solvers. Since schools cannot teach students all the vast information they need to know, the students, instead, have to be taught how to find the information they need and how to work cooperatively together (The Partnership for Kentucky School Reform).

Peter Winograd, who works in the Office of Assessment and Accountability at the Kentucky Department of Education, concurred that the reform was developed to raise the standards for students' knowledge and capabilities (S-4). Roberts & Kay, Inc. reported that the education reform developed from the belief that

excellent schools support the philosophy that all children can learn at high levels (1). According to Sexton, when Kentuckians declared that the state's need for better schools and jobs was a major concern, they claimed they were eager to pay more for education if they saw an improvement in the schools (1993).

History of KERA

The Kentucky Education Reform Act contains several components that ensure each child equal educational opportunities centered on preparing the whole child for life. One part is the preschool program, which provides an opportunity for young children at risk, children who have not had the opportunities as other children to interact, to get a head start on learning. Children in preschool attend school for half a day, four days a week. During the school year before they begin kindergarten, they have the opportunity to learn how to get along with others and how to respect other students and their teacher. This interaction with others is especially helpful for the child who has not been around other children. A second component, known as the ungraded primary program, can consist of students in kindergarten through the third grade. The ungraded primary program helps keep students from "failing." Instead of being taught in separate classrooms, these students are taught together in the same classrooms. Since the children do not have to progress to the next grade at the end of each school year, a child who would have formerly been held back in the same grade for another year stays

in the same class with the same peers.

Another part of the reform involves a new method for assessing students. Instead of taking achievement tests, students take newly designed tests which require them to work together and in real-life situations. The Kentucky Education Reform Act provides for more flexibility for educational professionals such as teachers and principals by scheduling several professional development days throughout the school year. Instead of all staff having a few days when they have to attend, more choice and variety are given to educators about topics discussed and days to participate.

The reform has also established regional service centers to provide local instructional resources and to make it possible for teachers to acquire tools which help various types of learners to succeed. School-based councils, another component, offer shared decision-making opportunities. These councils consist of a certain number of teachers, parents, and the principal(s) who make school decisions and establishes policies. Extended school services, which provide extra help for weaker students, also help ensure an equitable education for all students. Students referred for extended school stay after school for an hour, two days a week, for approximately half the school year. Because one teacher helps only five to ten students, they receive essential assistance.

Another part of the reform is the family and youth service centers, which address students' physical and emotional wellness. Some of the activities that the family and youth service centers may offer include collecting clothes for a student who has lost a

home or providing support for a child who has family problems.
In addition to the assessment and professional development, the
expanded use of technology also supports the curriculum.
Kentucky's schools are now using more modern technology
(Transformations: Kentucky's Curriculum Framework 4). As the
curriculum framework for Kentucky schools under the reform was
being developed, the developers were guided by the belief that
"successful schools are for students..." and that "effective
instruction facilitates learning..." (ii)

Rationale

The main focus of this thesis, however, is concerned with a third belief of the developers: "All children can learn at high levels..." (ii) In a letter to the author in response to her request for pertinent information, Cindy Heine, the Associative Executive Director of the Prichard Committee, wrote about hearings of the legislative Task Force on Education Reform held in 1990. At these hearings, legislators discussed the need to raise expectations for all students to a higher level. They believed this was the most important idea for education in Kentucky. Their reasoning lay in the fact that Kentucky's economy is changing, and, as a result, students will have to succeed at higher educational levels to meet the requirements of future jobs. In response to the specific question of how learning at a high level is defined, Heine wrote that no specific definition exists but that all schools are required to help all children achieve the goals and academic expectations of the Kentucky Education Reform Act (April 18, 1995).

Literature Review

Geoffrey Short, Faculty of Education in New College, Durham, reported on the classic study about the self-fulfilling prophecy within an educational setting, conducted by Rosenthal and Jacobson in 1968. After giving the Harvard Test of Inflected Acquisition to all the classes in an elementary school in California, the researchers misled the staff into believing that the test was capable of identifying a student's ability for intellectual development. Next, they randomly selected twenty percent of the students from each class and informed their teachers that they were selected on the basis of their expected achievement. Rosenthal and Jacobson found that the students who were expected to perform well actually did do better after an eight-month interval (1985). This study relates to learning at a high level because if teachers have self-fulfilling prophecies which allow them to portray to students that they cannot succeed, then many of those students actually will not succeed from the lack of encouragement.

Some education experts and many other people in the United States firmly believe that certain children are uneducable. The

acceptance of this theory has caused teachers and administrators to be hopeless about the success of students. It has also practically doomed the children to nonproductive, sometimes destructive lives. This belief is an erroneous theory (Holland B1). When teachers hold beliefs like this one, then those teachers will not expect students to perform at higher levels. In turn, if teachers let students know that they do not expect success at a high level, most students will not reach higher levels of achievement.

A similiar study was conducted by the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation of New York, which chose the Jefferson County Public Schools, as well as school districts in Baltimore, Milwaukee, Oakland, and San Diego, to decide if the schools could fundamentally alter the education of students from high-poverty areas. Their goals were simple yet complex: to replace traditional low achievement and low standard with reforms that stressed high expectations, high content, and high support. After implementation of these ideas, the results, which support the idea that all children can perform at higher levels, were that achievement generally improved (Holland B1).

In fact, according to Karyn Wellhousen, an assistant Professor of Early Childhood Education at the University of Texas, early childhood teachers are likely to be the most important role models in children's lives, with the exception of parents and immediate relatives. The teachers' language and behaviors can have lasting effects on students' self-identity. Wellhousen also cited a suggestion from Carl Rogers: from his humanistic theory, he believed that children should receive

unconditional positive regard from their teachers (1993).

Research in the '60's and '70's clearly showed that teacher expectations can and do become self-fulfilling prophecies. For instance, in 1968, Beez studied Head Start teachers and discovered that those who had high expectations for their students tried to teach more words than those teachers who held low expectations. In addition, teachers' expectations affect teachers' behaviors, which, as a result, affect students' behaviors. Ross and Jackson found that teachers' expectations were based largely on students' academic performance levels. The teachers were more aware of children's success than of their sex or submissiveness (1991).

Labeling children can also be a negative aspect of some teachers' expectations. Attitudes of teachers are an especially important part in the education of abnormal children. Generally, teachers view rejected students as having more difficulty in academic subjects. Teachers have tendencies to label these children as "disruptive, irritable, aggressive, domineering, dishonest, and selfish." Not surprisingly, teachers have more positive interactions with high-achieving students than with low-achieving students (Maag, et. al., 1991).

As a matter of fact, according to Joy Gooding , a Writing Resource Teacher based in Flemingsburg, Kentucky, tracking students with labels, such as "gifted," "slow," "basic," or "reluctant" gives teachers opportunities to enrich or limit their instructional materials, strengthen or relax their teaching strategies, and raise or lower their expectations. These practices, in turn, create "a world of injustice in our

educational system." She explained that this method of grouping students is contrary to the ideal of the Kentucky Education Reform Act. The law requires equal educational opportunities for all children and guides schools to hold high expectations for all students. If Kentucky's learning goals are to be achieved, the students must not have labels that cause teachers to limit what they learn and their levels of success (1992).

Along with tracking students, letter grades can be detrimental to the below-average children. Therefore, the Kentucky Education Reform Act contains four levels of performance which stress developmental aspects of learning. A "novice" student displays minimal understanding. An "apprentice" student shows gaps in his/her conceptual understanding. A "proficient" student misinterprets some less important details. A "distinguished" student fully understands and sometimes goes beyond understanding. Whereas the idea of being "novice" just means that a student can grow, a letter grade of an "F" implies that a student is a failure. The student at the lowest level of performance merely needs more opportunities to practice and model the students who do very well (Winograd 1992).

When the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation conducted its study, known as the Clark initiative, it found that after the teachers were involved in the study, more of them expected their students to learn at high levels. These teachers also acquired skills to help their students perform at high levels. Amy Robertson, a seventh-grade language arts teacher, exemplified how teachers' attitudes can affect their students. Before the Clark initiative, she was very frustrated. "Once I learned I was the

one who needed to make a change and that I had to have high expectations, things got better," she said (Holland B1).

Kentucky Research

Since the Kentucky Education Reform Act has been passed, research has been conducted on both education and the act itself in Kentucky. Tom Wilkerson & Associates Ltd., which is a Louisville-based market-research firm, conducted 1,426 surveys by telephone, and mailed surveys to counselors and superintendents throughout the state. The people surveyed by phone included the general public, parents of public-school children, teachers, and principals. A significant finding in this study was that "only half of the principals and one-third of the teachers polled believe that all children can learn at high levels--one of the tenets of the reform act." In fact, only thirty-five percent of the teachers agreed with the statement that all children can learn at a high level. Fifty-two percent disagreed, and thirteen percent were undecided. Another shocking finding in this study was that only thirty-four percent of the teachers agreed with high standards for all students, and over half, sixty-six percent, disagreed with having high standards for all students (Schaver A8).

Roberts & Kay Inc., a Lexington-based market-research firm,

was sponsored by the Prichard Committee to conduct a study in three communities in Kentucky. This research was the third consecutive annual qualitative study in a series which was seeking to understand the opinions, beliefs, and values that influence Kentuckians' choices and actions on behalf of their public schools. Researchers conducted nine two-hour focus groups. The ninety-two participants, recruited through random sampling, included parents, teachers, students, school administrators, school board members, and the general public (Roberts & Kay 1993).

Most people in the study accepted different expectations that different schools have of children because each school's stratification reflects the stratification in society. Some participants believed that society could not work without different capability levels. One administrator stated that a high level for a particular person may not be a high level for another person (Roberts & Kay, 1993).

Roberts and Kay also found that a small number of participants believe in the tenet underlying the philosophy of the Kentucky Education Reform Act that all children can learn at high levels. The respondents stated that children have inborn abilities that education cannot change. Even though they did not agree with the statement, however, most of the participants in the study thought that children could learn more than they currently were. Kay and Roberts concluded that this disagreement with a major part of the Kentucky Education Reform Act was an obstacle to the reform (Schaver B1).

However, most of the participants in the study defined

learning at high levels the way schools have traditionally defined it: being quick at gaining knowledge that will result in successful test-taking and good grades (Roberts & Kay 1993). The developers of the Kentucky Education Reform Act, on the other hand, defined learning at high levels as being able to meet the academic expectations and goals of the reform act (Wilborn 1995).

Roberts and Kay found that the less schooling the children had, the more participants believed in their abilities. Most had the highest expectations of children from birth through the end of their primary years in school. The people who had the most frequent exposure to school structures--the teachers and the students--and who presumed differences in children's learning potential were more likely to disagree with the idea that all children can learn at high levels. Roberts and Kay concluded that schools and communities could rely on the belief that all children can learn more as grounds for convincing Kentuckians to broaden their expectations of children even further (1993).

Other findings of Roberts and Kay included the likelihood that most Kentuckians currently believed that only some children can learn at high levels. Many of the participants who did agree absolutely with the philosophy which underlies the Kentucky Education Reform Act were school board members and school administrators (1993).

In an article about the changes resulting from the Kentucky Education Reform act, Schaver reported on a study conducted by the Appalachia Education Laboratory. This study found that many teachers seemed to be making changes in their classrooms because of the new accountability system which determines if schools

should receive cash rewards or be sanctioned on the basis of their test results. The goal to help all children learn did not seem to have a major impact on teachers; in fact, some of the teachers even complained that the new standards were too high. Another discouraging finding from the study was that teachers and principals were doubtful that all children should be encouraged to learn at high levels (Schaver B2). A positive relationship between high standards and receiving rewards was mentioned during a question-and-answer session about Kentucky schools receiving rewards for their good test scores, a session which was broadcast on Kentucky Educational Television on February 7, 1995. Ed Reidy, a deputy commissioner at the Kentucky Department of Education, encouraged schools which did not receive rewards to look at successful schools. He also stated that some of the ingredients that the schools receiving rewards possessed seemed to be teamwork, a level of high standards for all students, and an attitude of being able to succeed (Schaver A9).

Method

Surveys of teachers' beliefs on children learning at a high level and on the Kentucky Education Reform Act were distributed by the author in fourteen schools located in four different counties: Hardin, Todd, Breckinridge, and Simpson. The first school made up 5.6% of the total surveyed. The second school included 6.8% of the population. The third, fourth, and fifth schools made up 8.7%, 7.5%, and 1.2%, respectively. The lowest represented school was the sixth school of .6%, while the highest represented school was the fourteenth school with 14.3%. The eighth school consisted of 8.7% while the ninth school represented 5.6%. The tenth, eleventh, and twelfth schools contained 6.8%, 7.5%, and 11.8%, respectively. The thirteenth school was the second most represented with a total of 13% of the population (See Figure 1).

Out of 161 participants, 114 were primary teachers and thirty-six taught fifth and/or sixth grade. The rest of the participants consisted of eight special education teachers and a librarian, a counselor, and a principal (See Figure 2). Approximately one-third of the educators had been in their fields

from half a year to nine years. Another third had been working in their careers for ten to nineteen years. The last third of the participants had twenty to thirty years of experience (See Figure 3). The items on the surveys followed a 7-point Likert scale from 1, strongly disagree, to 7, strongly agree, with undecided in the middle.

Data

In the surveys, the first item stated that all children can learn at a high level. Throughout the remaining pages, five different items stated this basic sentence, except with five different dependent factors or variables. Three of these statements showed no significant correlation with the number of years of teaching: the basic statement that all children can learn at a high level, the statement that individual differences limit the ability to learn at a high level, and the statement that different meanings exist for individual students learning at a high level.

On the other hand, the other three items each significantly correlated with amount of experience. Two of the variations had the same level of significance, meaning that they were equally significant. However, one was a positive correlation (the level of agreement increased as the years increased), and the other was a negative correlation (the level of agreement decreased as the years increased). The correlation of the number of years and the statement that all children can learn at a high level under the proper conditions was negatively significant, while the

correlation of years with the statement that individual, physical restrictions inhibit the ability to learn at a high level was positively significant.

Even though these two statements were significantly correlated with the number of years of teaching, the significance was not as high as the correlation between experience and the statement that all children can learn at a high level with the proper support, encouragement, and environment, which was the most significant correlation for the items of learning at a high level with or without dependent factors or variables. This was also a negative correlation: as the years increased, the agreement decreased.

The results to all of the items, with the exception of one, which stated that all children can learn at a high level, with or without a dependent factor or variable, were not what the author believed they would be. In fact, two of the statements had opposite correlations from what the author predicted. Both the statement that all children can learn at a high level with the proper support, encouragement, and environment and the statement that all children can learn at a high level under the proper conditions were negatively correlated with the experience: as the years increased, the agreement decreased. The author, on the other hand, believed that they would both be positively correlated and that there would be a negative correlation between the number of years of teaching and the basic statement: as the years went up, the agreement would go down. The results, however, did not show a significant correlation. Two of the statements, the statement that individual differences limit

higher level learning and the statement that different meanings for learning at a high level exist for individual students, did not show any significant correlations, but the author believed each of these would be positively correlated: the agreement would go up with the increasing years. Only one of the author's predictions was correct: the statement that individual, physical restrictions inhibit the ability to learn at a high level had a significant, positive correlation with the years of teaching.

The percentages of the participants who agreed, disagreed, or were undecided were also found. With 56.6% disagreeing with the basic statement, it was the fourth highest item with which the participants disagreed. The disagreement with the items that stated that all children can learn at a high level with the different variables or dependent factors varied (See Figure 4). While 47.2% disagreed with the statement that all children can learn at a high level with the proper support, encouragement, and environment, only 31.1% disagreed with the statement that all children can learn at a high level under the proper conditions. The irony of these results is that the two items are basically the same idea, just stated with different words and with only one other item between them on the layout of the survey.

The other three variations of the basic statement that all children can learn at a high level had more agreement than disagreement. The expected outcome was that the percentages of participants agreeing with the statement that individual differences limit the ability to learn at a high level and the statement that individual, physical restrictions inhibit the capacity to learn at a high level would be approximately the same

because these two statements are also basically the same but worded differently. This prediction was correct: 85.6% agreed with the former statement, and 82.6% agreed with the latter, a difference of only 3%. The last variation of the basic statement had the highest agreement of any other item in the survey. Ninety-six and two-tenths percent of the participants agreed with the statement that different meanings for learning at a high level exist for individual students.

Other individual items in the surveys were analyzed. One item asked the participants if they believed that the hands-on approach of the Kentucky Education Reform Act was more effective for most students than the "lecture approach." Even though there was a significant negative correlation between the number of years of teaching and this item, 86.3% of the participants agreed with this item.

Another item in the surveys asked the participants if educators were responsible for creating avenues for higher levels of learning. Even though the author predicted that a positive correlation would occur between this item and the amount of experience, no significant correlation was found. In the ranking of percentages of participants who agreed with a certain item, this item was the third from the highest item with which they agreed; a total of 148 or 91.9% of the educators agreed with this. Only two of them (1.2%) disagreed, while 6.8% were undecided. No participants strongly disagreed.

Four of the items in the surveys addressed the subject of teachers' expectations. The items asked if children were affected by teachers' expectations, how these expectations were

derived, and if children receive a fair and accurate evaluation (See Figure 5). When the participants were asked if they believed that children were affected by teachers' expectations, most agreed. In fact, 153 out of 161, or 95%, of the educators agreed. Only three of them, or 1.8%, disagreed, and 3.1% were undecided. No participants strongly disagreed. Although the author predicted that a positive correlation would occur between the number of years of teaching and this item (as the years increased, so would the agreement with the item), no significant correlation was found.

Two of the four items on teachers' expectations asked on what they were based. The first item asked participants if the expectations were based on achievement test scores, while the second item asked if they were based on actual performance. Only 6.2% agreed that they were based on achievement test scores, but 84.4% agreed that they were based on actual performance. While the number of educators who believed that expectations are based on actual performance was high, it is important that the goal be for 100% of the educators. Of the remaining participants, 87.6% disagreed and 6.2% were undecided on the statement of expectations being based on achievement test scores. While 10% disagreed, 5.6% were undecided about the idea that expectations were based on actual performance.

As a conclusion to address teachers' expectations, the last item on the subject asked the participants if all children receive a fair and accurate evaluation. The disheartening results from this question were that over half (55.3%) of the participants disagreed that all students receive a fair and

accurate evaluation. Unfortunately, as well, all of the remaining educators did not agree with the statement: 24.9% agreed, while 19.9% were undecided.

Another discouraging finding of the author was the results of the item which asked the participants if they believed that the present education system addresses the needs of all children. One hundred eight educators out of 161 surveyed, which was over half (67%), disagreed with this statement, while only 21.1% agreed. The remaining 11.8% were undecided on this item. A significant negative correlation was also found between this item and the number of years of being an educator. On the other hand, slightly over half (86 out of 161 or 53.5%) of the participants agreed with the item that questioned if the Kentucky Education Reform Act's structure and programs are aimed to address the goal of learning at a high level. Of the remaining educators surveyed, 27.9% disagreed, while 18.6% were undecided.

Each respondent was given a total survey score showing his/her overall agreement with the survey which also measured his/her agreement with the Kentucky Education Reform Act. In other words, the higher the score, the more the educator agreed with or supported the reform act. A positive significant correlation was found between the years of teaching and the respondent's total survey score. Interpreted, the longer the participant had been in education, the more s/he agreed with the Kentucky Education Reform Act.

Then, mean survey scores were calculated for each school (See Figure 6). Eight out of the fourteen schools had mean survey scores between 80 and 88.5. The survey scores for most of

the schools had range values between twenty-three to fifty-three, which demonstrated that variability was high within the schools. The author noticed some interesting findings between the schools concerning their mean survey scores and their ranges of survey scores. For example, the fifth school, which was the second lowest represented, had the lowest mean score, but the seventh school, which was the third lowest represented, had the highest mean score. The intriguing finding was that these two schools are headed by the same principal. Another finding of the author was that the ninth school, which only consisted of nine participants, had the highest survey score as well as the lowest survey score. The fourth school, made up of twelve out of the 161 respondents, had one of the second highest survey scores as well as the third lowest survey score. These two schools, the ninth and the fourth, also had the two highest range values, respectively.

To correlate the schools' mean survey scores with their test scores from 1994, the school year in which the surveys were conducted, the author combined the total percentage of proficient and distinguished levels for each of the four content areas from each of the fourteen schools (See Figure 7). The author combined the proficient and distinguished because those are the two highest levels. In fact, the education reform act states that all schools should have the goal of all students reaching at least the proficient level. When the schools' mean survey scores were correlated with their test scores, they approached significance but did not show a significant correlation.

The author believed that as the mean survey scores for the

schools rose, so would the test scores. Even though a significant difference was not found, the author did notice some important connections between the schools' mean survey scores and their total percentage of students at the proficient and distinguished levels combined. The most amazing connection to the author was that the school with the highest mean survey score also had the highest percentage (53.6%) of proficient and distinguished test scores combined. Even though the school with the lowest mean survey score did not have the lowest percentage of test scores at the combined proficient and distinguished levels, it had the second lowest percentage of test scores with a difference of only 2.1% with the lowest test score. This school, the tenth school, had a range value of twenty-three, which was toward the lower end of range values. The fourteenth school, which was the most represented with 14.3% of the survey population, only had the fifth lowest mean survey score but ranked eighth from the lowest in test scores with 35.7% at the proficient and distinguished levels combined. The range value of this school was twenty-nine.

Three of the schools had a difference of seven between their rank in mean survey scores and in test scores (See Figure 8). The school with the third lowest test scores had the fifth highest mean survey score. This school's range value was twenty-seven. The fifth school on the test score scale was ranked as the twelfth school on the mean survey score scale. Its range value was twenty-three. The school with the fourth highest percentage of students at the combined proficient and distinguished levels had the fourth lowest mean survey score.

Another interesting connection was that the school that ranked ninth on the scale of test scores had the lowest mean survey score. The biggest difference between the two scales was seen in the sixth school, which had the second lowest percentage for the test scores but had the second highest mean survey score.

Conclusion

What the author was looking for in these surveys was whether the schools' test scores would increase as their staff's agreement with the Kentucky Education Reform Act's statement that all children can learn at a high level increased. She was also interested in whether the test scores would go up as the schools' mean survey score went up. Even though no significant difference was found, the author did make some interesting connections. The most surprising was that participants responded differently to the idea of all children learning at high levels when the basic statement was worded differently or had certain variables on which the idea was dependent. The author expected different answers when the basic statements involved variables of different meanings, limitations, and encouragement. However, two statements were basically saying the same thing, but the answers had some difference of agreement between them.

The most discouraging finding the author noticed was the percentage of participants who did not believe that all children receive a fair and accurate evaluation. Slightly over half disagreed that all children are evaluated accurately and fairly,

and only an approximate quarter agreed that they are. The rest of the educators were undecided.

When the Kentucky Education Reform Act was created, many people were opposed to it. One of the main reasons so many citizens were against the reform act was that many people simply do not like change. Many citizens, educators as well as non-educators, did not know what to expect from this reform. In addition, many educators did not know how to begin changing their teaching styles to fit with the ideas of the Kentucky Education Reform Act. One reason that slightly over half of the participants the author surveyed disagreed with the underlying statement of the Kentucky Education Reform Act that all children can learn at a high level may be because the documents on the reform act do not clearly define what it means for all children to learn at a high level. In fact, some of the participants wrote the word "define" beside the statement. If this were clearly stated in the documents, maybe more educators would agree with the statement.

It is imperative that our educators have high expectations of their students in order for the students to have enough confidence and encouragement to aim at achieving high. Research has clearly proven that students are affected by their teachers' expectations. Almost everyone has heard of at least one person who did not do well in school because of one particular teacher.

Even more specifically, it is very important that educators expect all students to achieve at their highest levels in order to support the Kentucky Education Reform Act and the education of their students. Even though every child cannot perform at the

same high level as every other child, every child can be encouraged and supported to achieve at the highest level possible for himself/herself. To clear up some confusion in the minds of educators as well as other citizens, the simple statement should be reworded to state that all children can learn at their highest possible level.

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Appendix 1

Honors Thesis
Project Survey

1. The philosophy behind KERA states that "Every child can learn at a high level." Do you agree?
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree
2. Do you feel, in general, KERA's structure and programs are aimed at addressing this goal?
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree
3. The "pre-KERA" era has been accused of being mediocre, too "standardized" and lacked the ability to instill creative, divergent-thinking students. For the most part, do you agree that this statement is a valid description?
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree
4. Do you feel that the KERA mandated writing portfolios across the curriculum encourage better writing/thinking skills?
 - a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree

5. Do you believe that it is possible the writing portfolio practice could generate a high level of cognitive abilities in general?
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree
6. Do you feel that KERA's hands-on approach is more effective for most students than the "lecture approach?"
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree
7. Do you feel that the present public education system addresses the needs of all children?
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree
8. Do you feel that, given the proper support, encouragement and environment, every child has the ability to learn and perform at a high level?
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree

9. It has been said that, due to the fact that we are living in an age of information overload, our goal as teachers should be teaching students how to use their cognitive abilities (such as how to locate information, think critically and apply the information) rather than teach facts.
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree
10. Do you believe that, under the proper conditions, all children can learn at a higher level?
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree
11. Do you feel that a teacher's expectations of a child are based on achievement test scores?
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree
12. Do you feel that a teacher's expectations of a child are based on actual performance?
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree
13. Do you feel that children are affected by a teacher's expectations?
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree

14. Do teachers have the time to devote to a child who is capable of learning at a higher level?
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree
15. Do you believe that there are individual differences that will limit learning at a higher level?
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree
16. Do all children receive a fair and accurate evaluation?
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree
17. Are educators responsible for creating avenues for higher levels of learning?
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree
18. Do you believe that there are individual, physical restrictions that inhibit capacity for higher learning?
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree

19. Do you believe that learning at a high level has a different meaning for each individual student?
- a. Strongly disagree
 - b. Moderately disagree
 - c. Slightly disagree
 - d. Undecided
 - e. Slightly agree
 - f. Moderately agree
 - g. Strongly agree

How many years have you been teaching?

What grade do you teach?

Appendix 2

Representation of the schools

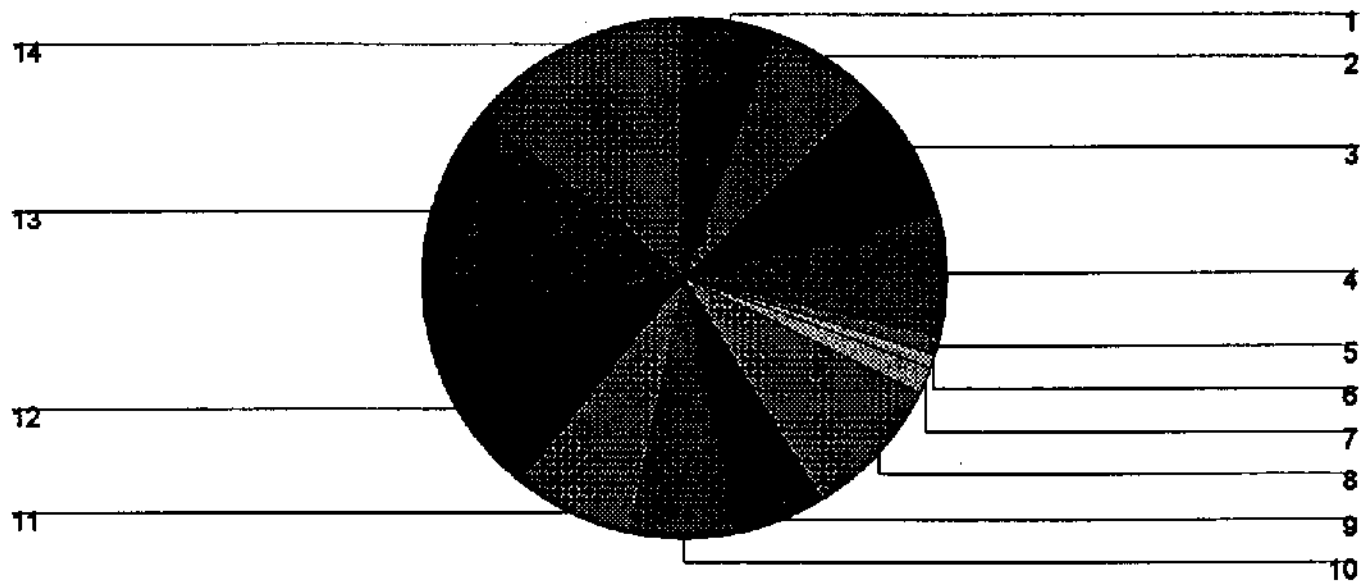


Figure 1

Distribution of grades taught

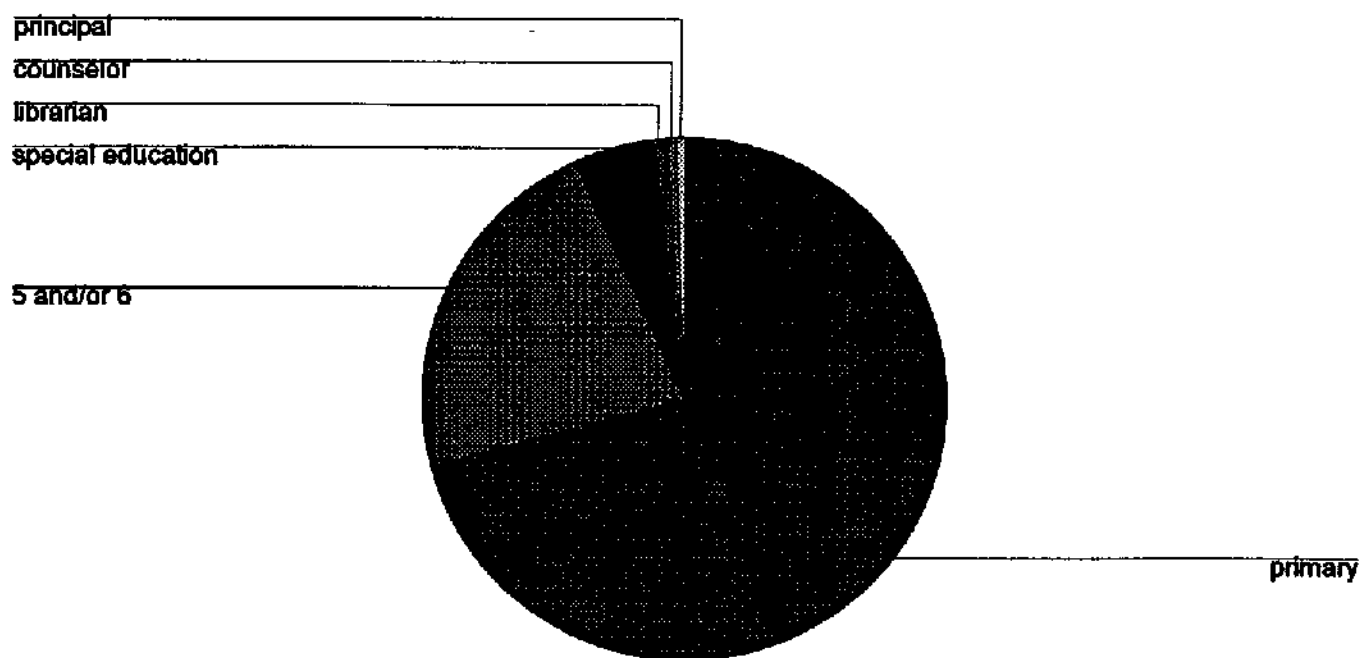


Figure 2

Years of experience

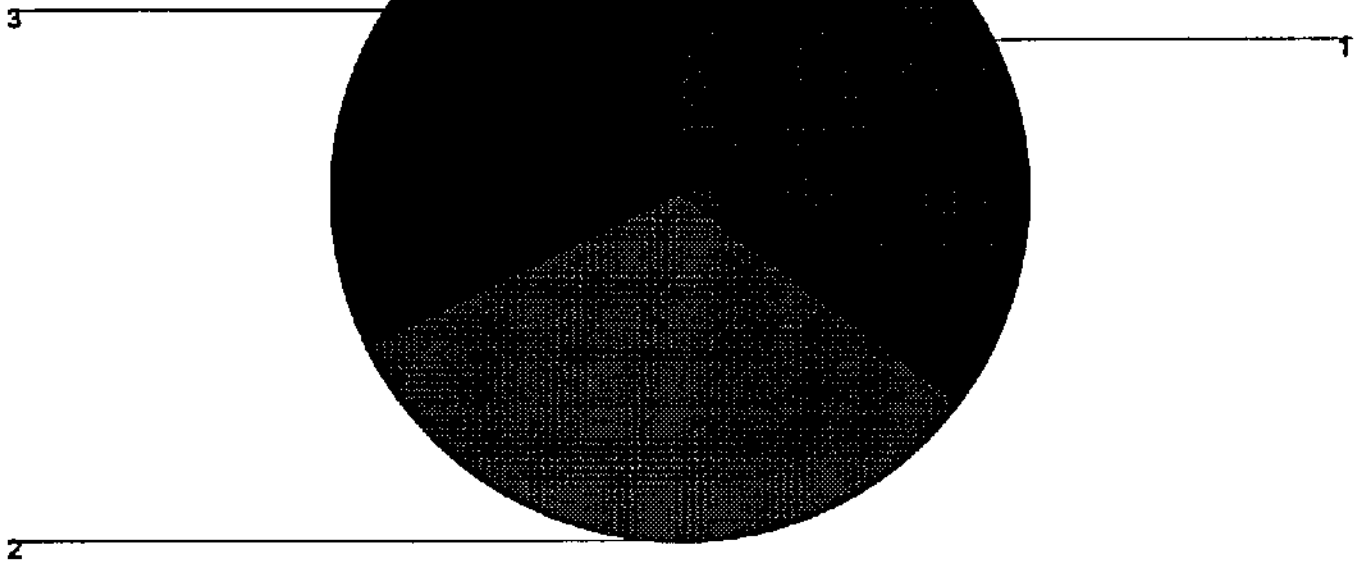


Figure 3

Questions relating to learning at a high level

	% Agreed	% Undecided	% Disagreed
Question 1	33.0	10.6	56.6
Question 8	45.3	7.5	47.2
Question 10	60.2	8.7	31.1
Question 15	85.6	8.7	5.5
Question 18	82.6	9.9	7.4
Question 19	96.2	2.5	1.2

Figure 4

	% Agreed	% Undecided	% Disagreed
Question 11	6.2	6.2	87.6
Question 12	84.4	5.6	10.0
Question 13	95.0	3.1	1.8
Question 16	24.9	19.9	55.3

Figure 5

Schools	Survey Mean Score	Range of Suvey Scores	Minimum Survey Score	Maximum Survey Score
1	87.0	34	68	102
2	83.5	39	64	103
3	86.1	36	77	113
4	83.8	46	67	113
5	79.0	10	74	84
6	95.0	0	95	95
7	103.3	15	96	111
8	94.0	20	85	105
9	85.2	53	61	114
10	80.3	23	66	89
11	94.1	23	80	103
12	92.3	27	79	106
13	88.5	38	67	105
14	85.0	29	73	102

Figure 6

Schools	Total % Proficient and Distinguished	Survey Mean Score
1	39.2	87.0
2	30.8	83.5
3	41.1	86.1
4	41.0	83.8
5	36.9	79.0
6	15.0	95.0
7	53.6	103.3
8	31.1	94.0
9	23.1	85.2
10	12.9	80.3
11	24.0	94.1
12	16.1	92.3
13	46.0	88.5
14	35.7	85.0

Figure7

Schools	Rank of Total % Proficient and Distinguished	Rank of Survey Mean Score
1	10	8
2	6	3
3	12	7
4	11	4
5	9	1
6	2	13
7	14	14
8	7	11
9	4	6
10	1	2
11	5	12
12	3	10
13	13	9
14	8	5

Figure 8

Questions	% Agreed	% Undecided	% Disagreed
1	33.0	10.6	56.6
2	53.5	18.6	27.9
3	36.1	10.6	53.4
4	72.0	9.3	18.6
5	52.8	19.3	27.9
6	86.3	6.8	6.8
7	21.1	11.8	67.0
8	45.3	7.5	47.2
9	53.4	14.9	31.7
10	60.2	8.7	31.1
11	6.2	6.2	87.6
12	84.4	5.6	10.0
13	95.0	3.1	1.8
14	28.6	13.0	58.4
15	85.6	8.7	5.5
16	24.9	19.9	55.3
17	91.9	6.8	1.2
18	82.6	9.9	7.4
19	96.2	2.5	1.2